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Aids to Bible Readers.¹

THE LETTER OF JAMES.

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James the Lord's brother: his place in the Church: his doctrinal position—His letter addressed to Christian Jews outside of Palestine—Their condition and the purpose of the letter—Its characteristics—Analysis.

JAMES the Lord's brother, though in the life of Jesus not a believer in him, became early in the apostolic age a leading man in the Christian Church. The way in which he is spoken of both in the epistles of Paul and in the book of Acts implies that he was at the head of the church at Jerusalem, and a man of influence not only in Jerusalem, but among Christians generally. See Gal. 1:19; 2:9—he is even mentioned here before Cephas and John; compare the prominent place which the book of Acts (15:13 ff.) assigns to him in its account of this same event—Gal. 2:12; 1 Cor. 15:17; Acts 12:17; 21:18. Tradition agrees substantially with these intimations of the New Testament. He is said to have been surnamed the Just, because of his exceeding righteousness, to have been highly esteemed both by Christians and by Jews, and finally to have died a martyr's death (probably about 63 A.D.) testifying to Jesus (Josephus Ant. 20, 9, 1; Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 2, 23). During the latter years of his life, he was practically the head of Jewish Christianity, sustaining to it a relation similar to that of Paul toward Gentile Christianity. Though he did not take the attitude of hostility to Gentile Christianity which the opponents of Paul assumed, but, on the contrary, recognized the validity of Paul's mission to the Gentiles according to Paul's understanding of it (Gal. 2:9), yet for himself and for his Jewish brethren he clung to the law. Tolerant toward the more liberal view so far as it affected the Gentiles, it is nevertheless doubtful whether he ever fully appreciated its real meaning—quite certain that he never would have reached it for himself.

¹ Under this head will be published from month to month articles intended to furnish help in the intelligent *reading* of the books of the Bible *as books*. They will aim to present not so much fresh results of critical investigation as well established and generally recognized conclusions.

This is undoubtedly the James of the New Testament Epistle of James.

The letter is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are in the dispersion," *i. e.*, to Jewish Christians outside of Palestine. For though the tone of the letter is in general such that it might almost as well have been addressed to Jews as to Christians, yet one or two passages show clearly its Christian character. See 1:1, 2:1, also those that are somewhat less clear, 2:7; 5:7, 8. These were the larger parish of James, perhaps in part Jews who had come under the influence of their brethren who accepted Jesus as the Messiah when visiting Jerusalem to attend the feast, perhaps in part commercial travelers (see 4:13) who either had once resided in Jerusalem, or had come in contact with Christians in their travels. We speak of them as Jewish Christians, yet it would probably be more correct to call them Christian Jews, or to use the expression of Acts, Jews that believed, *i. e.*, in Jesus as the Christ. For it is doubtful whether any of those to whom the letter was addressed recognized themselves as in any sense the less Jews because they had become Christians. Christianity—even this word did not yet exist for them, their faith, let us say—was to them simply a type, to them the true type, of Judaism.

The letter being written to persons scattered in many places, and indeed in some cases moving from place to place, could not in the nature of the case address itself to any particular situation existing in a given place and at a given time, but is necessarily somewhat general in character. Yet it is written to accomplish a definite result. Those to whom James writes are very far from being perfect according to the standard of the law or of the gospel. Most of them were poor (2:5, 6; the passage 5:1-6 is probably not addressed to the readers of the letter, but is a denunciatory apostrophe to the rich outside of the Christian synagogue); they were subject to trial which it was needful for them to bear with patience, and to temptations which evidently they did not always resist. Though poor, and oppressed by the rich they were yet meanly obsequious to them. Faction, jealousy, strife, self-confidence were prevalent among them. Perhaps the root of all their faults lay in their having carried over into their lives as believers the old characteristic vice of the Judaism of their day, a formal conception of religion, which makes it consist in the holding of certain opinions rather than in character and conduct. As Jews, which be it remembered they still were, they were prone to be hearers of the law rather than doers. As Christians they were inclined to make faith a

mere assent to certain propositions, rather than a relation to God transforming their lives.

The purpose of the letter is intensely practical, and its method is the method of a practical man. James does not emphasize for his readers the theological error which underlay their mistakes of life. He rebukes their sins directly and by name, insisting upon the necessity of a high and pure morality. Intimations there are indeed in his references to the new birth (1:18) and to the law of liberty (1:25; 2:12) that he knew that the only spring of right conduct is in a renewed heart, whereon God has by the word of truth written the new law, that thus becomes a law of liberty. Yet these things are but referred to in passing. The stress of the letter's emphasis is upon objective right living.

Though it shows evidently the influence of the ethical teachings of Jesus, it is very different from the discourse of Jesus. Though it touches on some of the same themes with which Paul dealt, and teaches a doctrine to which Paul would have assented, it reflects a mind of a very different cast from his. The profound insight of Jesus did not belong to his brother according to the flesh. The organizing and reasoning power of the Apostle to the Gentiles did not appear in the head of the Jewish Christian church. Nevertheless it is very wholesome advice which James writes to his Jewish brethren abroad; and after all these centuries the Church finds this letter still useful, helpful reading. Sententious, almost epigrammatic in style, abounding in simile and metaphor, the book is full of sentences that stick in the memory, and carry their lesson with them. If it is, as perhaps the majority of scholars hold, the earliest writing of the New Testament collection, this fact adds interest to the study of the book and furnishes a hint of what Christianity would have been had no Paul arisen with profounder insight into the true significance of the gospel of Christ.

There is little that can be called plan in the book. It consists of short paragraphs whose connection one with another is chiefly in the one purpose that animates the letter.

ANALYSIS.

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| 1. Salutation. | 1:1. |
| 2. Concerning trials and temptations. | 1:2-18. |
| 3. Doers of the word, not hearers only. | 1:19-27. |
| 4. Against respect of persons (obsequiousness to the rich, contempt of the poor). | 2:1-13. |

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| 5. Against faith without works, which is dead. | 2 : 14-26. |
| 6. Concerning the use of the tongue. | 3 : 1-12. |
| 7. Against faction and conceit of wisdom. | 3 : 13-18. |
| 8. Against love of pleasure and of the world, leading to strife and pride. | 4 : 1-10. |
| 9. Against evil speaking and judgment one of another. | 4 : 11, 12. |
| 10. Presumptuous planning and boasting reproved. | 4 : 13-17. |
| 11. The oppressive dealing of the rich denounced. | 5 : 1-6. |
| 12. Patient waiting for the coming of the Lord enjoined. | 5 : 7-11. |
| 13. Against swearing. | 5 : 12. |
| 14. Praise and prayer enjoined. | 5 : 13-18. |
| 15. Care for the erring ones enjoined. | 5 : 19, 20. |